

Changing Role of Specialist Provision in Supporting Inclusive Education

Formative Evaluation of Peer Learning



EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

CHANGING ROLE OF SPECIALIST PROVISION IN SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



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CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. INTRODUCTION | 5 |
| 2. METHODOLOGY | 6 |
| 2.1 Providing evaluation input at an early stage of phase 2 | 6 |
| 2.2 Collecting feedback from all participants | 7 |
| 2.3 Providing evaluation results after each workshop | 8 |
| 3. DATA COLLECTION | 13 |
| 3.1 Analysis of the methodological framework | 13 |
| 3.2 Evaluation of the first workshop | 14 |
| 3.3 Evaluation of the first intermediate online platform meeting | 18 |
| 3.4 Evaluation of the second workshop | 21 |
| 3.5 Evaluation of the second intermediate online platform meeting | 28 |
| 3.6 Evaluation of the final project conference | 31 |
| 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS | 35 |
| 4.1 Online workshops | 35 |
| <i>The workshop should follow the same dialogic structure as the first workshop</i> | 36 |
| <i>Thematically, the focus is now on other questions, and instead of four thematic areas, this time the participants will work on six guiding principles</i> | 36 |
| <i>Presentation slides should be shared with all participants in advance</i> | 36 |
| <i>Participants should be given the opportunity to use the chat function bilaterally</i> | 36 |
| <i>Participants should be given five minutes to reflect on what they have heard after each presentation</i> | 37 |
| <i>Presenters should get guiding questions to be able to go deeper into the examples</i> | 37 |
| <i>Sufficient time should be provided to reflect on the lessons learnt and to document the results</i> | 37 |
| <i>Plenary phases should be shortened, breakout phases should get more time compared to the first workshop</i> | 38 |
| <i>The number of participants per group should be increased by setting up just two breakout rooms</i> | 38 |
| 4.2 Intermediate online platform meetings | 39 |
| 4.3 Final project conference | 40 |
| 4.4 Final remarks | 42 |



1. INTRODUCTION

The [Changing Role of Specialist Provision in Supporting Inclusive Education](#) (CROSP) project focused on the re-organisation of specialist provision to support the right to inclusive education for all learners. The project had two phases:

- Phase 1 covered a detailed mapping exercise on past and current trends and situations in countries in relation to specialist provision, as well as on perceived future trends. It showed that the shift to a rights-based approach builds upon specialist provision's ability to act as a resource for mainstream education. The analysis revealed that most countries are making significant efforts towards transforming specialist provision into a resource for mainstream inclusive education.
- Phase 2 built on this knowledge and elaborated on policies and strategies to support specialist provision's transformation into a resource for mainstream education (thematic areas: funding, capacity building, governance, quality assurance). It looked also at co-operation mechanisms between specialists and mainstream that enable school stakeholders to implement inclusive education. Finally, it analysed which skills and methodologies are required for specialist provision to act successfully as a resource.

In early 2020, a methodological and analytical framework for a peer-learning activity was developed, building upon previous project work by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency): [Country Policy Review and Analysis](#) (CPRA) and [Financing Policies for Inclusive Education Systems](#) (FPIES). Implementation of this activity started in October 2020 and lasted until the final project conference in May 2022.

Agency member countries were invited to participate in the phase 2 project activities and to nominate an expert to take part in the peer learning. This expert had to be a policy-maker (main target group for the project outputs).

The evaluator's task has been to assess the extent to which engagement in this peer-learning activity allowed for learning outcomes for countries (policy-makers, practitioners) that can help them achieve changes in the process of specialist provision's new role in supporting inclusive education.

Among other things, the formative evaluation focused on:

- the appropriateness of the working procedures;
- the benefit for countries, as well as for the Agency;
- means and strategies for implementing the peer-learning process, their strengths, weaknesses and ways forward.

The report summarises the formative evaluation's methodology and key findings.



2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Providing evaluation input at an early stage of phase 2

As the evaluator was involved in the phase 2 project activities at an early stage, the formative evaluation did not have to be limited to the central phase 2 activities – namely, the two workshops and the final project conference – but could also support the preparation of these planned activities at an early stage.

In early 2020, the CROSP project team developed a methodological framework for the peer-learning approach and for the organisation of thematic workshops in the CROSP project phase 2 activities. This methodological framework was systematically analysed to see to what extent the proposed steps and methods were suitable for achieving the project objectives, which were also detailed in the document. This analysis aimed to address potential gaps or open questions arising from the methodological framework early on in the project. The analysis results served to support the preparation of the project activities and to be able to move towards consistent implementation of the methodological framework in all the subsequent project activities.

In the analysis of the methodological framework, the first approach was to identify the overall aims and objectives for phase 2 (see [analysis item a](#) below), which were found in various locations in the document. These aims and objectives make up the aspects that would be assessed in a summative project evaluation. They determine whether and to what extent the project was successful.

To achieve these goals, phase 2 was divided into several steps. These steps had to be suitable in their entirety and in their interaction to achieve the previously identified overall objective. The following eight steps could be identified from the methodological framework, even if they were not named or had a different name:

1. Thematic grouping of countries
2. Preparation of the first workshop
3. Implementation of the first workshop
4. Intermediate step between the first and second workshops
5. Preparation of the second workshop
6. Implementation of the second workshop
7. Intermediate step between the second workshop and the final project conference
8. Final project conference.

For each step, the methodological framework was checked again to determine which statements were made about it there, and which concrete sub-goals were assigned to these steps (see [analysis item b](#) below). Finally, the methodological decisions that the methodological framework contains with regard to the ‘how’ of achieving the objectives for each step were also worked out (see [analysis item c](#) below).



With these three analysis items, the methodological framework was systematically scrutinised with regard to the following questions:

- a. Do the individual aims of each step, put together, constitute a sufficient/appropriate base to achieve the desired aims and objectives of the whole project?
- b. Is the selected methodology for each step sufficient/appropriate to achieve the desired outcomes (=aims) of that step?
- c. Do the respective methodologies of each step sufficiently/appropriately constitute the methodology of the whole project?

The results of this review of the methodological framework with regard to these three issues were presented and discussed at a Project Advisory Group (PAG) meeting. This made it possible to identify gaps in the methodological framework at an early stage, to reflect on chosen procedures on a case-by-case basis and to discuss alternative ideas for certain steps.

2.2 Collecting feedback from all participants

The formative evaluation focused on examining the effectiveness of peer learning. Consequently, the evaluation of whether and to what extent the project's peer-learning approach has proven its worth must be based on the judgement of all peers involved. In addition to individual interest in further personal development in the project's subject area through participation in the project, the interests of the respective nominating organisations (especially the ministries of education) and the Agency were further assessment criteria for the evaluation.

In addition, there are overarching objectives that address the impact of project participation on policy and its further development in the respective countries. However, it is usually not feasible to identify and evaluate these within the framework of time-limited projects. Therefore, they should be included in a larger, regular impact analysis at a sufficient time after the respective intervention (in this case, peer learning) to allow the impact to become clear.

Accordingly, the formative evaluation is limited to the personal goals of the participating peers and their assessments of the transferability and impact of the knowledge gained in their respective organisations.

Methodologically, a classic survey approach was chosen to collect these assessments from all participants. In the first workshop, all participants received an evaluation questionnaire to answer at the end of each workshop day, as the content of the workshop days was different and therefore different evaluations could be expected. The second day of the second workshop (actually only half a day) focused exclusively on the feedback of the results from the first day's group discussions, so only one evaluation form was prepared – in agreement with the project team – which covered both workshop days.

In the first workshop, the preparatory documents and information were given for assessment as part of the surveys. As part of the surveys in the second workshop, the



intermediate online platform meeting (June 2021), which had been added in the course of the project, was included in the assessment.

The second workshop and the second intermediate online platform meeting were both evaluated separately, with online surveys. As the final project conference took place as a face-to-face meeting in May 2022, this last project activity was evaluated via a paper-pencil survey.

Formative evaluation is particularly useful when recurring activities in a project are to be improved. In the CROSP project, there was a chance to learn from the experiences of the first workshop and to modify the second workshop accordingly. Therefore, the survey conducted during the second workshop included additional questions comparing the two workshops. This was because the project team consciously decided to introduce some changes to the workshop design before implementing the second workshop – drawing on the first workshop’s evaluation results. The additional questions focused on these changes and asked to what extent the participants considered them improvements or disimprovements. Similarly, the evaluation results of the first online platform meeting were used to improve the second meeting.

The surveys were conducted on an online platform (except for the evaluation of the peer-learning exercise at the final project conference) and made available to all participants via an access link. Participation in the surveys was voluntary and anonymous. Most of the questions were closed, but a few open questions at the end of the survey allowed for further feedback.

2.3 Providing evaluation results after each workshop

The formative evaluation also aimed to provide the project team with the precise information that would be helpful for further developing and improving the peer-learning approach in a timely manner after the workshops or the conference. A few days after both workshops, the survey results were made available to the project team for review.

After the first workshop, the project team met specifically to review and assess the evaluation results; there was no such dedicated meeting after the second workshop.

For the presentation of the results, a procedure was chosen that allows different depths of knowledge. At the top level, a characteristic value (score) was calculated for each question and normalised to a numerical range from 0 to 100 points. 100 points represented the maximum achievable value and would be obtained if all respondents had given the maximum rating, and 0 points represented the worst value.

Almost all questions could be answered using a Likert scale with several degrees. For example, there were six different answer options for the question ‘To which extent did you hear today about examples of best practice from other countries?’. These were:

- ‘Not at all’ (= 0 points)
- ‘To a small extent’ (= 20 points)
- ‘To some extent’ (= 40 points)
- ‘To a moderate extent’ (= 60 points)



- 'To a great extent' (= 80 points)
- 'To a very great extent' (= 100 points).

For a quick comparison of the answers to this question with all other answers, a score was calculated from the answers of all participants on all three workshop days (here: 67 points). This cumulative result can also be used, for example, to put the topics considered into an evaluation order, and then to examine the questions with the lowest scores more closely with regard to the possible reasons for these results.

At the next level, the respective scores are calculated for the different workshop days, as these differ in the design of, for example, working and plenary phases or in the composition of the participants. In fact, most of the questions show different scores on the different workshop days (in the example: day 1: 68 points, day 2: 62 points, day 3: 70 points). A discussion of the aspects which may have been different on the workshop days may indicate the reasons for the different scores.

The next level of detail is achieved by showing the response options in their respective frequencies summarised over the workshop days (see [Figure 1](#)). As the scores are calculated by averaging, the information about the distribution of the answers to the respective answer options is lost. Although this could be expressed by calculating the standard deviation as a further indicator, readers usually find this difficult to interpret, which is why it has not been used here. Instead of the standard deviation, a visual representation of the distribution of the answers was chosen, making it possible to immediately identify unusual distributions.



To which extent did you hear today about **examples of best practice from other countries**

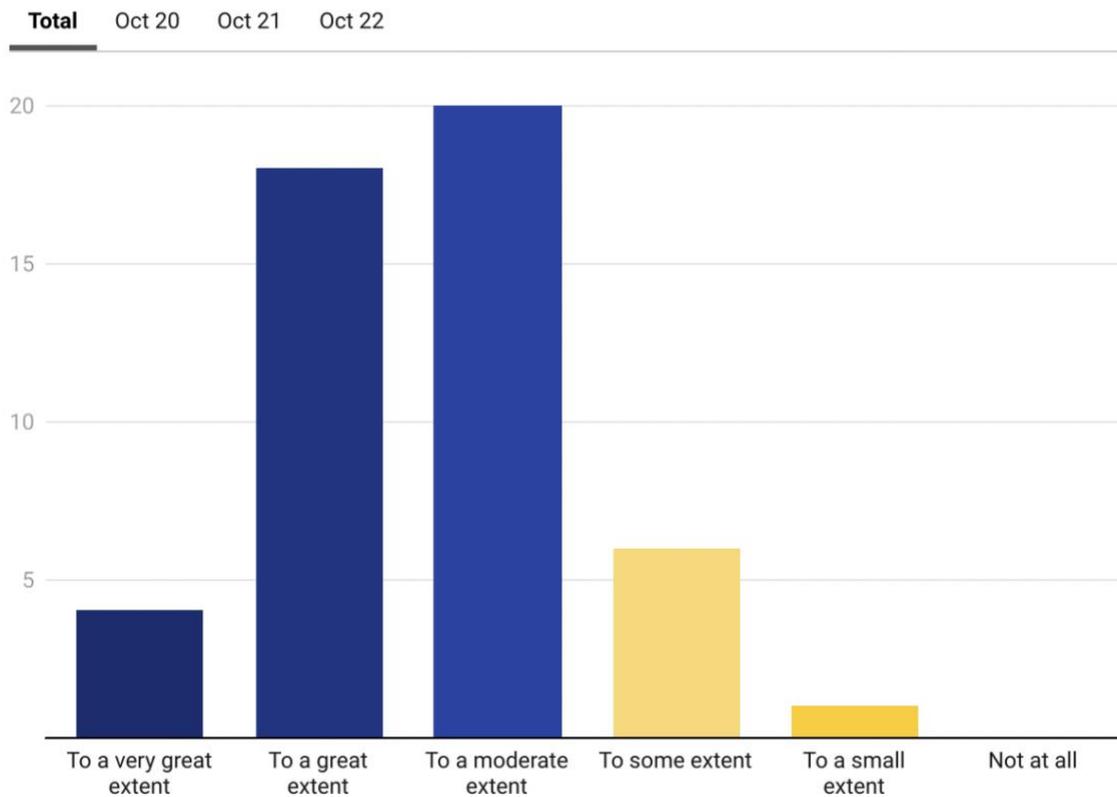


Chart: Formative evaluation workshop #1 (Oct 20 - 22, 2020) • Source: CROSP • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 1. Example: Frequency of response options cumulated over three workshop days

The last level of detail concerns the representation of the frequency distribution again, but now on all single workshop days (see Figures [2](#), [3](#) and [4](#)). Here, too, a different distribution on the days may be lost in the cumulative frequency distribution.



To which extent did you hear today about **examples of best practice from other countries**

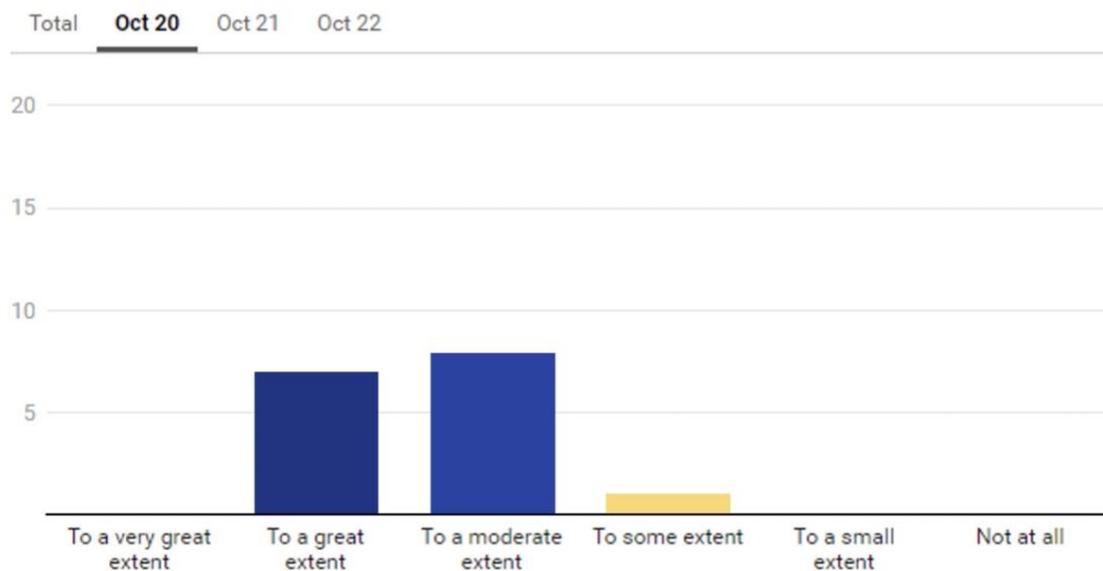


Chart: Formative evaluation workshop #1 (Oct 20 - 22, 2020) • Source: CROSP • [Get the data](#) • [Download image](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Figure 2. Example: Frequency of response options for the workshop on 20 October

To which extent did you hear today about **examples of best practice from other countries**

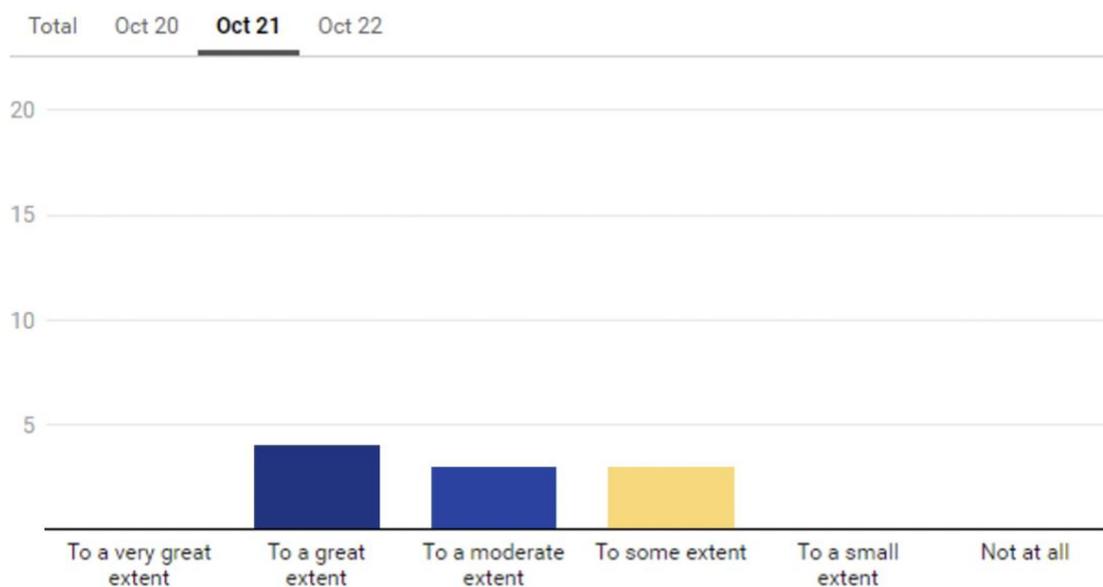


Chart: Formative evaluation workshop #1 (Oct 20 - 22, 2020) • Source: CROSP • [Get the data](#) • [Download image](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Figure 3. Example: Frequency of response options for the workshop on 21 October



To which extent did you hear today about **examples of best practice from other countries**

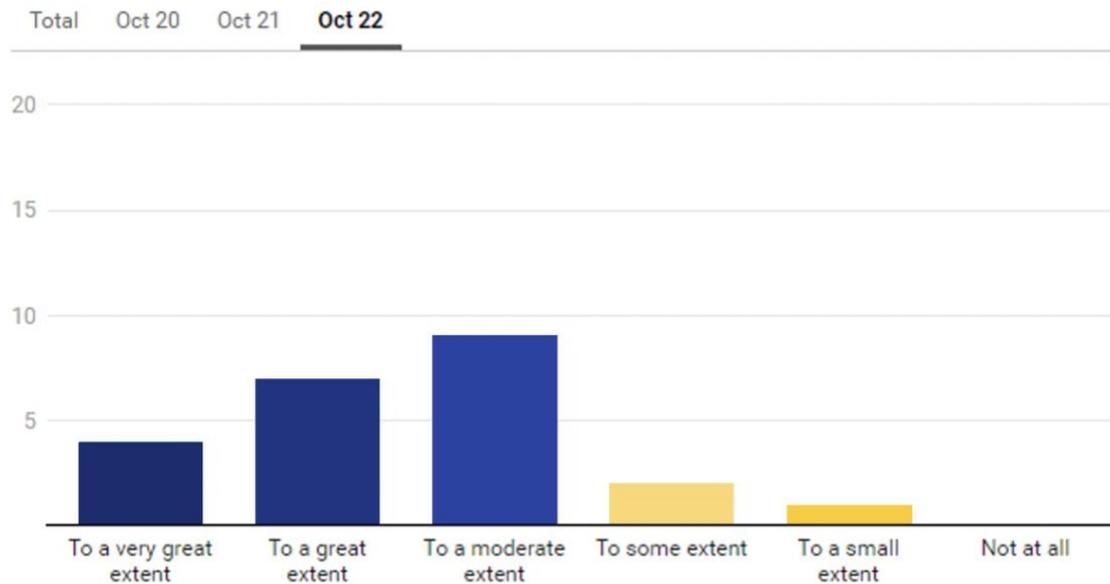


Chart: Formative evaluation workshop #1 (Oct 20 - 22, 2020) • Source: [CROSP](#) • [Get the data](#) • [Download image](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Figure 4. Example: Frequency of response options for the workshop on 22 October

While the two workshops were similar in nature but different in their specific design, the final project conference offered a completely different setting for peer learning. Therefore, the question arose as to which insights into a goal-oriented peer-learning process could flow from the workshops into the conference design, and which new considerations would be necessary. At the same time, the continuing uncertainty as to whether and when face-to-face meetings would be possible made the conference planning more difficult.



3. DATA COLLECTION

3.1 Analysis of the methodological framework

This section provides a short summary of the results with regard to the three key questions used in the analysis of the methodological framework (see [section 2.1](#)). This analysis provided a number of insights that could be used directly to substantiate and complete the plans for phase 2 of the project. For example, it became apparent that some steps did not yet have a concrete definition of objectives or remained very general with regard to the planned activities. Consequently, a comparison of the extent to which the activities were suitable for achieving the goals was not feasible.

The question about the extent to which each step's respective methodologies sufficiently/appropriately constituted the methodology of the whole project ([analysis item c](#)) identified a few minor gaps. No corresponding methods could be found, for example, to allow countries to:

- collectively identify the policies and strategies to be developed to support the changing role of specialist provision towards inclusive processes;
- learn from each other's mistakes and experiences;
- identify differences in countries' national contexts, strengths and challenges;
- provide knowledge on evidence on the effectiveness (and efficiency) of the respective policies and strategies;
- critically examine the possible ways forward.

Discussion of these findings led to additions to the respective steps that could fill these gaps.

The second question ([analysis item a](#)) assessed whether the individual aims of each step, put together, constituted a sufficient/appropriate base to achieve the desired aims and objectives of the whole project. This was the case for most of the objectives. However, in some cases there were still gaps in the desired quality of the respective objective achievement. For example, the methodological framework was designed to enable member countries to achieve strategies to improve the changing role of specialist provision in implementing inclusive education. However, the wording of the objectives mentioned the development of **more effective** strategies. Such a goal makes it necessary to measure and compare strategies' effectiveness in order to distinguish between more and less effective strategies. However, the methodological framework did not indicate how this necessary comparison should be implemented in the project steps. A few other comparable cases served to critically discuss the objectives once again and, if necessary, to bring overly high expectations to a realistic level.

Finally, the last question in this analysis looked at the extent to which the selected methodology for each step was sufficient/appropriate to achieve the desired outcomes (=aims) of that step ([analysis item b](#)). In consultation with the project team, the analysis of this question was limited to steps 1 to 3, as these were the steps closest in time, while



steps planned for later in the project could easily be further specified and developed iteratively. Again, a few points were found that could be discussed in the PAG and taken into account when revising the methodological framework. All in all, this evaluation step served mainly to increase consistency between the methodological framework and the actual project approach.

3.2 Evaluation of the first workshop

The physical meeting of experts involved in peer learning, getting to know each other, developing trust and depth, and the exchanges based on this, are central elements for the success of such approaches. Accordingly, the methodological framework planned for face-to-face meetings of experts in different participating Agency member countries. However, the planning for the start of the peer-learning activities coincided with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and from one day to the next, travel and in-person meetings were no longer possible.

While it was initially assumed that a face-to-face meeting of the experts involved might be possible later in the year, the implementation plans eventually had to be adapted to the new reality. An online format for peer learning is not recommended in principle if there is the possibility of an in-person meeting. However, this possibility did not exist and therefore the implementation plans were rescheduled to online exchange meetings.

It was advantageous that most of the participants already knew each other from other Agency work – some of them for many years – which partly compensated for the disadvantages of online implementation. In addition, the timing of the first workshop (October 2020) meant that all participants had gained experience with video-conferencing systems in the meantime and were thus able to participate rather confidently.

In an attempt to create the best possible setting for peer learning despite the ban on physical contact, the first workshop was structured as follows. The participating countries were divided into two groups according to their thematic preferences (**governance, funding, capacity building, quality assurance**). The first group met on 20 October 2020, focusing on two of those four thematic areas, and the second group on 21 October 2020, focusing on the other two thematic areas. The structure of both days was identical and can be found in [Table 1](#). On 22 October 2020, both groups met. [Table 2](#) shows the structure of this final day.



Table 1. Workshop structure for 20 and 21 October 2020 (excluding breaks)

| Duration | Format | Content |
|------------|----------------------|--|
| 75 minutes | Plenary | Introduction Country input #1 on the first thematic area (10 minutes) Three responses (15 minutes) Two reflections (10 minutes) Country input #2 on the first thematic area (10 minutes) Three responses (15 minutes) Two reflections (10 minutes) |
| 45 minutes | Three breakout rooms | Each breakout room dealing with a different question |
| 30 minutes | Plenary | Presentation of the conclusions |
| 75 minutes | Plenary | Introduction Country input #3 on the second thematic area (10 minutes) Three responses (15 minutes) Two reflections (10 minutes) Country input #4 on the second thematic area (10 minutes) Three responses (15 minutes) Two reflections (10 minutes) |
| 45 minutes | Three breakout rooms | Each breakout room dealing with a different question |
| 30 minutes | Plenary | Presentation of the conclusions |

Table 2. Workshop structure for 22 October 2020 (excluding breaks)

| Duration | Format | Content |
|------------|----------------------|--|
| 75 minutes | Plenary | Presentation of the main learning points from the four thematic areas Discussion on links to be considered between the four issues/thematic areas |
| 45 minutes | Three breakout rooms | Each breakout room dealing with a different question |
| 60 minutes | Plenary | Main outcomes presented by three rapporteurs and open discussion |

For this first workshop, two surveys were conducted. The first one was used both on 20 and 21 October, because different participants took part in discussions on different topics, but both days followed the very same structure and process. The second survey was used on 22 October because that day followed a slightly different approach and merged the two groups, as detailed above. Hence, it was interesting to see the difference between the first two workshop days, but also the differences with the last day for those questions that were asked on all three days.



The survey on 20 and 21 October covered the following topics:

- Pre-meeting questionnaire (helpfulness, involvement of stakeholder to answer the questionnaire, appropriateness of the questions asked)
- Group composition (suitability, and sufficiency of participants' in-depth knowledge of the issues discussed)
- Preparatory materials (suitability regarding clarification of terminology, of workshop aims and objectives, and for the practical preparation)
- Results (learning points, identified policies and strategies, issues to be followed up in the project and in the own country, individual learning).

The survey on 22 October covered further topics:

- Results from the plenary meeting (learning points, further identified policies and strategies, issues to be followed up in the project, individual learning)
- Issues with regard to conducting the peer learning as a (online) workshop
- Plans for dealing with the results (dissemination in own organisation, relevance and transferability of results, aspects that worked well or not so well at the workshop, suggestions).

The evaluation of the total of 53 questions, most of them questions with answer options using various multi-level rating scales, is comprehensive and complex. Therefore, an online implementation of the results was designed that allowed interactivity and thus enabled the readers (i.e. the CROSP project team) to explore different levels of detail.

As explained before (see [section 2.3](#)), in the simplest case, the presentation provided an overview of the results by calculating the cumulative point values for each individual question (scores) and sorting the values. Questions with the highest scores were evaluated best, questions with the lowest scores correspondingly worst. In the further development of the peer-learning approach, it was important to consider both extremes: on the one hand, it must be a matter of eliminating the weaknesses that became apparent in the evaluation, but on the other hand, it must also be a matter of not overlooking the strengths of the implemented approach in the further development and losing them out of consideration.

[Table 3](#) and [Table 4](#) show the top 10 and bottom 10 questions with their respective scores. The total number of survey respondents in 2020 was 24.

Table 3. Top 10 scoring questions (workshop 1)

| Question | Score |
|---|-------|
| Which of the following types of information from your own country did you collect during your preparation? Possible areas for improvement of own approaches in your country | 100 |
| Which of the following types of information from your own country did you collect during your preparation? Country-specific challenges | 100 |



| Question | Score |
|---|-------|
| Do you consider the questions asked for preparation being helpful for today's discussions? (i.e. Did we ask the right questions ahead?) | 96 |
| Which of the following types of information from your own country did you collect during your preparation? Specific experiences from your own country | 96 |
| Did you have the chance to present the situation in your own country? | 92 |
| Did you fill in your answers to the set of questions to prepare for today? | 88 |
| To which extent did the materials provided in advance support you to technically prepare for the workshop (e.g. software to install)? | 88 |
| Please rate how well the following learning opportunities worked today for your own learning: Discussions in breakout rooms | 87 |
| To which extent were the facilitators helpful during the discussions? | 85 |
| To which extent did the materials provided in advance clarify the terminology used in CROSP? | 85 |

Table 4. Bottom 10 scoring questions (workshop 1)

| Question | Score |
|--|-------|
| Did you involve local stakeholders into your preparation? | 33 |
| Which of the following types of information from your own country did you collect during your preparation? Evidence on the effectiveness of any national/regional/local policies and strategies (i.e. evidence that the intended goal has been achieved) | 36 |
| Which of the following types of information from your own country did you collect during your preparation? Evidence on the efficiency of any national/regional/local policies and strategies (i.e. evidence on what effort was needed to achieve the goal) | 36 |
| To which extent did you hear today about evidence on the effectiveness of policies and strategies in other countries (i.e. evidence that their intended goals have been achieved)? | 56 |
| To which extent did you hear today about evidence on the efficiency of policies and strategies in other countries (i.e. evidence on what efforts were invested to achieve the goals)? | 56 |
| Which of the following types of information from your own country did you collect during your preparation? Failures that occurred in the past | 58 |
| To which extent did you hear today about failures that occurred elsewhere? | 62 |
| To which extent did the workshop provide opportunities to exchange bilaterally? | 63 |
| Did you send back your answers to the set of questions to the CROSP team? | 64 |
| If you had the chance to present the situation in your own country, to which extent was the feedback helpful for you? | 65 |



3.3 Evaluation of the first intermediate online platform meeting

In order to use the time between the workshops and to continue the discussions, an additional online meeting took place on 28 June 2021. The aim of the meeting was to enable participants to progress in elaborating the framework for developing the CROSP tool, but also to prepare the discussions for the second thematic workshop and the final project conference. [Table 5](#) shows the structure of this platform meeting.

Table 5. Meeting structure for 28 June 2021 (excluding breaks)

| Duration | Format | Content |
|------------|----------------------|--|
| 15 minutes | Plenary | Introduction |
| 30 minutes | Three breakout rooms | Focus: Re-orientation of special schools as resource centres Each breakout room dealing with the same set of questions |
| 15 minutes | Plenary | Short reports on the discussed principles and related points |
| 30 minutes | Three breakout rooms | Focus: In-school provision and external support to mainstream Each breakout room dealing with the same set of questions |
| 15 minutes | Plenary | Short reports on the discussed principles and related points Summing up |

Due to the short time available, the survey for the formative evaluation of this online meeting was not conducted on the day of the event, but in connection with the survey on the second workshop. At the second workshop, 12 of the 18 participants also took part in the intermediate online platform meeting. Eleven out of these twelve answered the questions regarding that event.

For the question about the extent to which this intermediate online platform meeting was suitable to keep the participants informed about the project's progress, a score of 75 points was achieved (see [Figure 5](#)), using the same scaling as before, with a range from 0 to 100 points. The suitability of this meeting to pick up and maintain the momentum gained in the first workshop was given a score of 69 points (see [Figure 6](#)). The suitability of the intermediate online platform meeting to continue discussions where they had to stop at the end of the first workshop got a score of 76 (see [Figure 7](#)). The assessment about whether a second online platform meeting between the second workshop and the final project conference could be helpful received a score of 72 (see [Figure 8](#)).



To which extent did the intermediate online platform meeting ... **keep you updated on the project progress?**

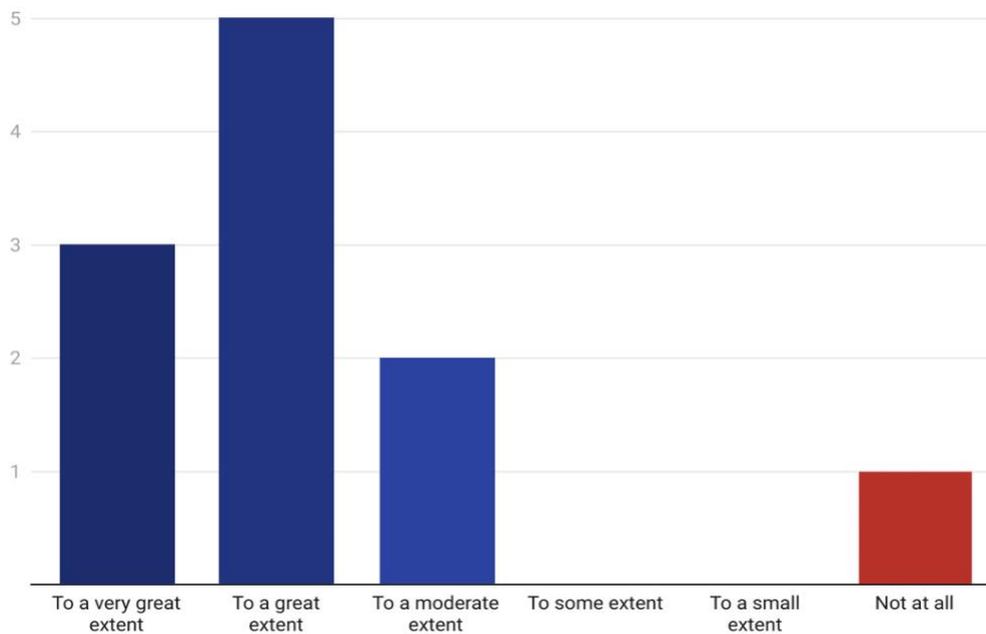


Chart: Formative evaluation workshop #2 (Oct 18 - 19, 2021) • Source: CROSP • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 5. Assessment of the intermediate online platform meeting with regard to the extent it kept participants updated on project progress

To which extent did the intermediate online platform meeting ... **manage to pick up and maintain the momentum gained in the first workshop?**

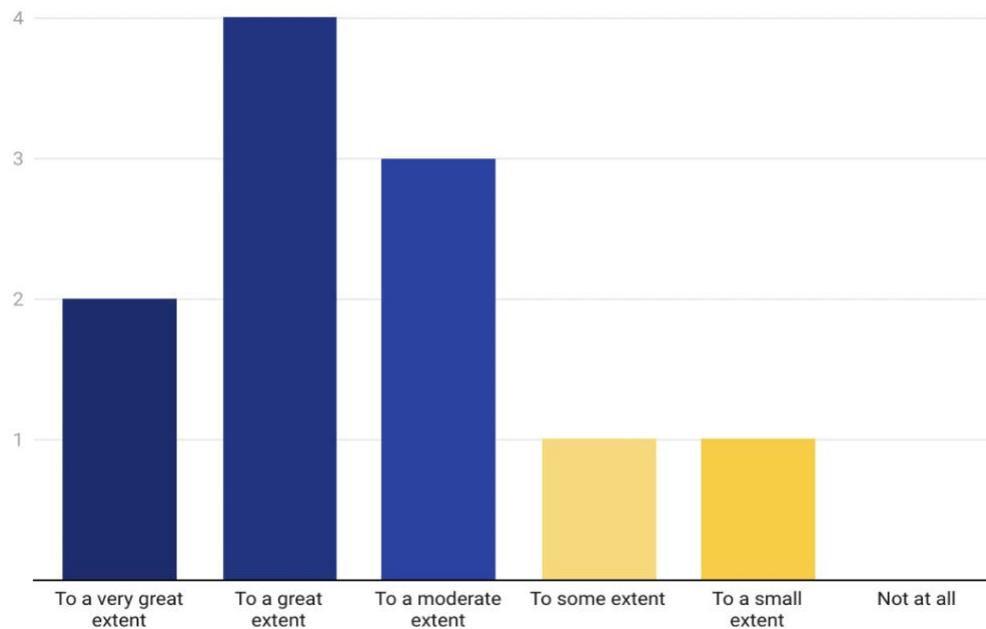


Chart: Formative evaluation workshop #2 (Oct 18 - 19, 2021) • Source: CROSP • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 6. Assessment of the intermediate online platform meeting with regard to the extent it managed to pick up and maintain the momentum gained in the first workshop



To which extent did the intermediate online platform meeting ... **help to continue discussions where they had to stop at the end of the first workshop?**

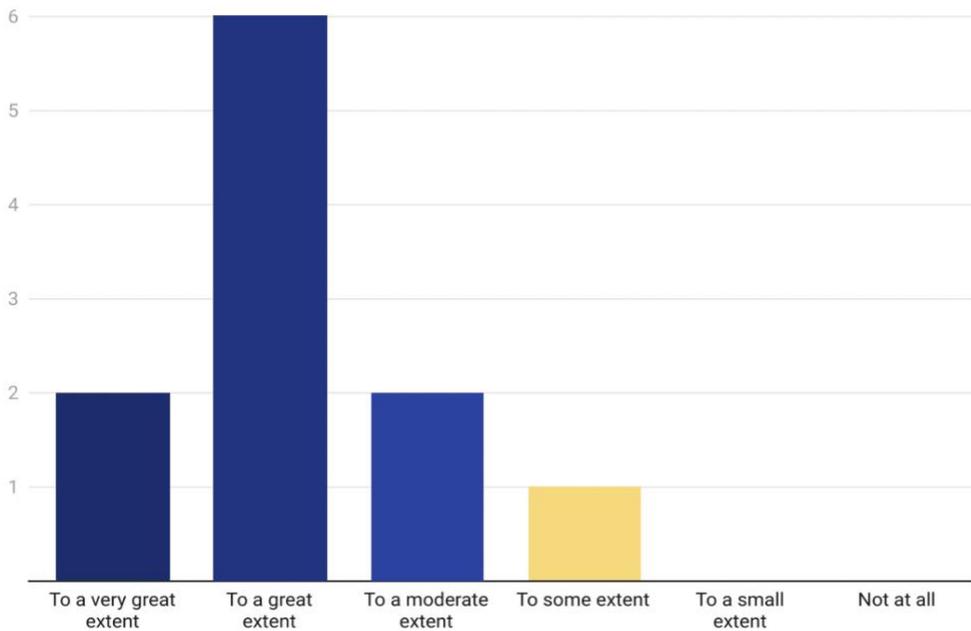


Chart: Formative evaluation workshop #2 (Oct 18 - 19, 2021) • Source: CROSP • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 7. Assessment of the intermediate online platform meeting with regard to the extent it helped to continue discussions where they had to stop at the end of the first workshop

To which extent ... **do you think a second online platform meeting between now and the final project conference would be helpful?**

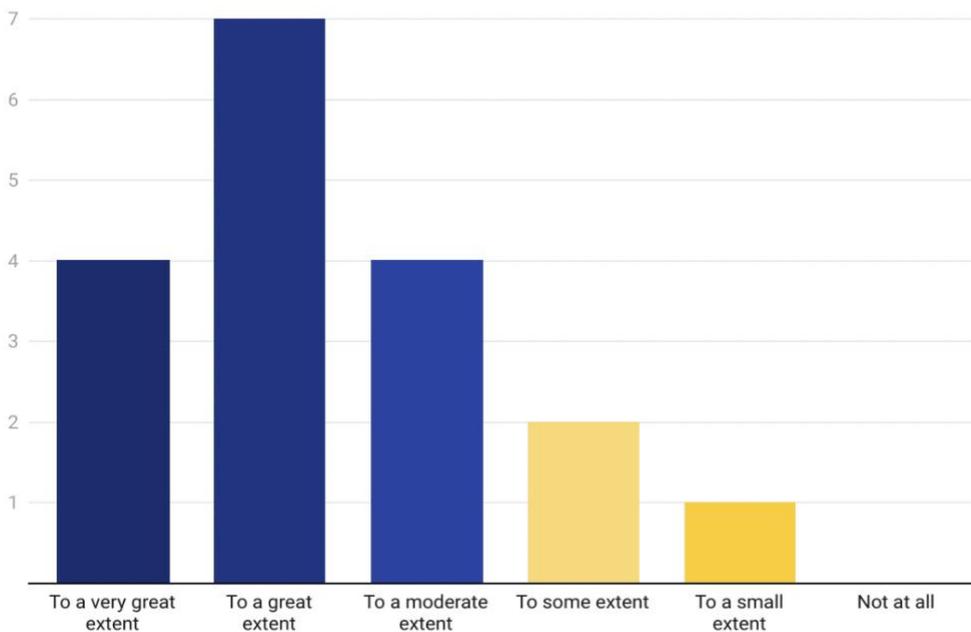


Chart: Formative evaluation workshop #2 (Oct 18 - 19, 2021) • Source: CROSP • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 8. Assessment of the intermediate online platform meeting with regard to the extent participants thought a second online platform meeting could be helpful



3.4 Evaluation of the second workshop

Based on the experience gained so far in the course of the project and the findings of the formative evaluation of both the first workshop and the intermediate online platform meeting, the second workshop was planned and designed differently compared to the first one. The following decisions were made for the implementation of this second workshop:

- The workshop should follow the same dialogic structure as the first workshop.
- Thematically, the focus is now on other questions; instead of four thematic areas, this time the participants should work on six guiding principles.
- Presentation slides should be shared with all participants in advance.
- Participants should be given the opportunity to use the chat function bilaterally (in the first workshop, the chat function was only available for sending messages to all participants at the same time).
- Participants should be given five minutes to reflect on what they have heard after each presentation (task to the facilitators).
- Presenters should get guiding questions to be able to go deeper into the examples.
- Sufficient time should be provided to reflect on the lessons learnt and to document the results.
- Plenary phases should be shortened; breakout phases should get more time compared to the first workshop.
- The number of participants per group should be increased by setting up just two breakout rooms.

It was also decided that the formative evaluation would take place at the end of the second workshop day only (i.e. only one questionnaire). A comparison of the evaluation results is of interest both for the aspects left unchanged compared to the first workshop and for the aspects deliberately designed differently. For selected questions, the participants were also explicitly asked to compare this workshop with the first workshop. Every change mentioned above, as well as every aspect left unchanged, are well-founded and in this respect are an important step in further developing the peer-learning approach. However, only the survey results will show to what extent these decisions are effective in practice. In the sense of continuous improvement, the following results can therefore be used to further adjust and develop alternative and innovative ideas for the implementation of peer learning.

Since face-to-face meetings were still not possible, the second workshop also had to take place online. The previously discussed changes were reflected in an adapted workshop format. The first day (see [Table 6](#)) focused almost exclusively on working in groups, while the second (half) day (see [Table 7](#)) brought together the results of the groups and used the plenary session for discussions on the CROSP tool.



Table 6. Workshop structure for 18 October 2021 (excluding breaks)

| Duration | Format | Content |
|-------------|--------------------|---|
| 30 minutes | Plenary | Introduction |
| 120 minutes | Two breakout rooms | Each breakout room dealing with the six guiding principles Country input #1 on guiding principle 1 (15 minutes) Two reflections (15 minutes) Country input #2 on guiding principle 2 (15 minutes) Two reflections (15 minutes) Country input #3 on guiding principle 3 (15 minutes) Two reflections (15 minutes) Open discussion (30 minutes) |
| 120 minutes | Two breakout rooms | Each breakout room dealing with a different guiding principle Country input #4 on guiding principle 4 (15 minutes) Two reflections (15 minutes) Country input #5 on guiding principle 5 (15 minutes) Two reflections (15 minutes) Country input #6 on guiding principle 6 (15 minutes) Two reflections (15 minutes) Open discussion (30 minutes) |

Table 7. Workshop structure for 19 October 2021 (excluding breaks)

| Duration | Format | Content |
|-------------|---------|--|
| 120 minutes | Plenary | Presentation of the main learning points from the two breakout rooms Open discussion about the CROSP tool |

The following tables present the results of the evaluation of this second workshop (18–19 October 2021; abbreviated as WS 2). Where corresponding data was available, the tables also show comparative data for the first workshop (abbreviated as WS 1). The total number of respondents (and participants) in 2020 was 24 (on 22 October 2020), which was significantly higher than the 18 respondents (and participants) in 2021. As before, all results have been normalised to a scale ranging from 0 to 100 points, with 100 points as the best possible result. A first set of questions dealt with the workshop preparation (see [Table 8](#)) and organisation (see [Table 9](#)).

**Table 8. Questions relating to the preparation of the workshop and the group composition**

| Question | WS 1 | WS 2 |
|---|------|------|
| To which extent did the materials provided in advance support you to technically prepare for the workshop (e.g. software to install)? | 88 | 73 |
| To which extent did the materials provided in advance clarify the aims and objectives of the workshop? | 84 | 81 |
| To which extent did the materials provided in advance help you to clarify your role in the workshop sessions? | 83 | 81 |
| To which extent did you find countries in your group that you consider suitable to learn from for your specific country situation? | 73 | 78 |
| To which extent did you find enough countries in your group to collect different ideas or suggestions to proceed in your own country? | 66 | 72 |

Table 9. Questions related to the organisation of the workshop

| Question | WS 1 | WS 2 |
|---|------|------|
| To which extent was there enough time during the workshop to discuss with your peers? | 68 | 51 |
| To which extent was there enough time after each presentation to reflect individually on what was just presented? | – | 51 |
| To which extent were the presentations focused on the issues of the workshop? | 77 | 72 |
| To which extent were the facilitators helpful during the discussions? | 85 | 84 |
| To which extent was there a good balance between providing and receiving feedback? | 78 | 72 |
| To which extent did the program find a good balance between group work (in breakout rooms) and plenary phases? | – | 81 |
| To which extent did the workshop provide opportunities to exchange in a group? | 81 | 73 |
| To which extent did the workshop provide opportunities to exchange bilaterally? | 63 | 41 |
| To which extent did the workshop identify and discuss the four thematic areas (WS 1)/six guiding principles (WS 2)? | 75 | 76 |

Another part of the questionnaire was dedicated to topics on which this second workshop specifically focused (see [Table 10](#)). These were: elaboration of the enabling/success factors in countries' processes, the main challenges countries encountered in their processes, the main lessons countries learnt, and countries' plans for further developments. These were provided in the form of guiding questions to allow the speakers to prepare their presentations in advance.



Table 10. Questions on which only the second workshop focused

| Question | WS 2 |
|--|------|
| To which extent did you hear about enabling/success factors in countries' processes? | 72 |
| To which extent did you hear about main challenges countries encountered in their processes? | 82 |
| To which extent did you hear about main lessons countries learnt? | 74 |
| To which extent did you hear about plans for further developments in countries? | 71 |

Twelve of the eighteen respondents also took part in the first workshop and could therefore compare both workshops. The focus was on evaluating group size, time structure and peer learning in direct comparison to the first workshop (see [Table 11](#)). The underlying scale ranges from very good (100 points), good (75 points), acceptable (50 points), poor (25 points), to very poor (0 points).

Table 11. Evaluation of group size, time structure and peer learning in direct comparison to the first workshop

| Question | WS 2 |
|---|------|
| Compared to the first workshop, how well did the larger group size in the breakout rooms of this workshop suit you? | 63 |
| Compared to the first workshop, how well did the distribution of workshop time between plenary and group phases work out for you? | 67 |
| Compared to the first workshop, how well did your learning from peers work out this time? | 69 |

As described before, a goal for the second workshop was to provide all presentations to the participants in advance, especially as this was explicitly mentioned in the potential improvements from the first workshop. Shortly before the second workshop, however, it became apparent that not all speakers could deliver their contributions in time, and so this aspect could not be implemented.

Therefore, the question intended to evaluate the pre-provision was replaced by three questions asking more precisely about the participants' opinions. These additional questions aimed to improve the basis for decision-making on future workshop design preparations. As the results of the three questions differ significantly from the other questions in terms of the distribution of answers, the results are presented here as figures (see [Figures 9](#), [10](#) and [11](#)).

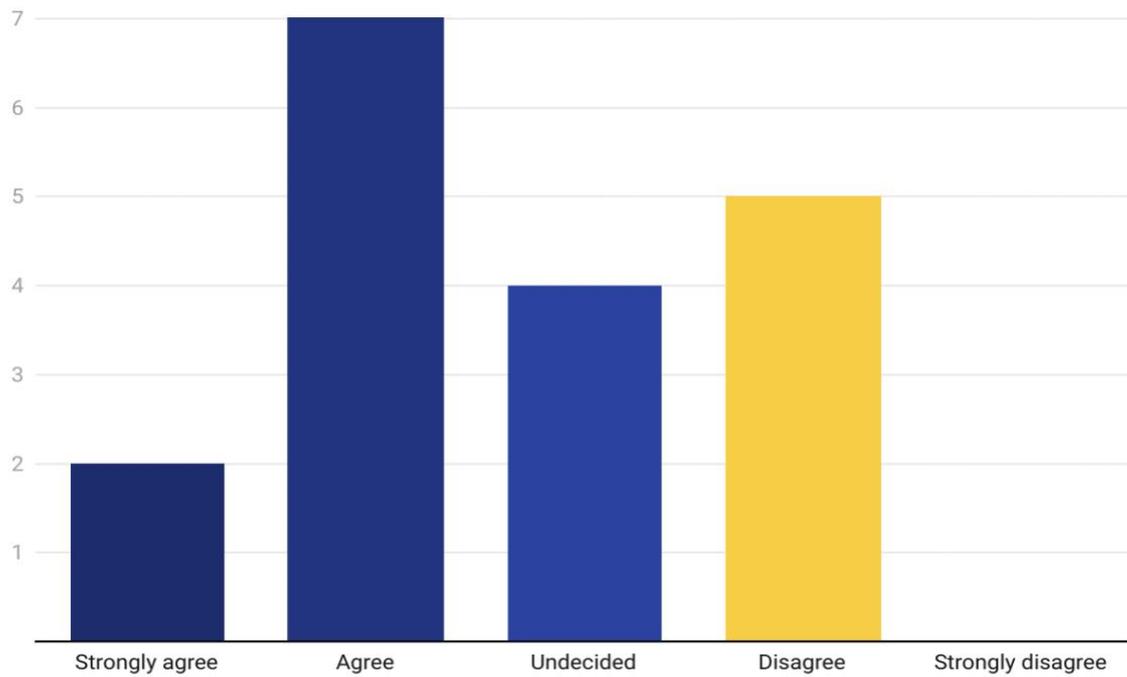


Chart: Formative evaluation workshop #2 (Oct 18 - 19, 2021) • Source: CROSP • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 9. Question: Usually I don't have sufficient time in advance of workshops to read through lots of documents

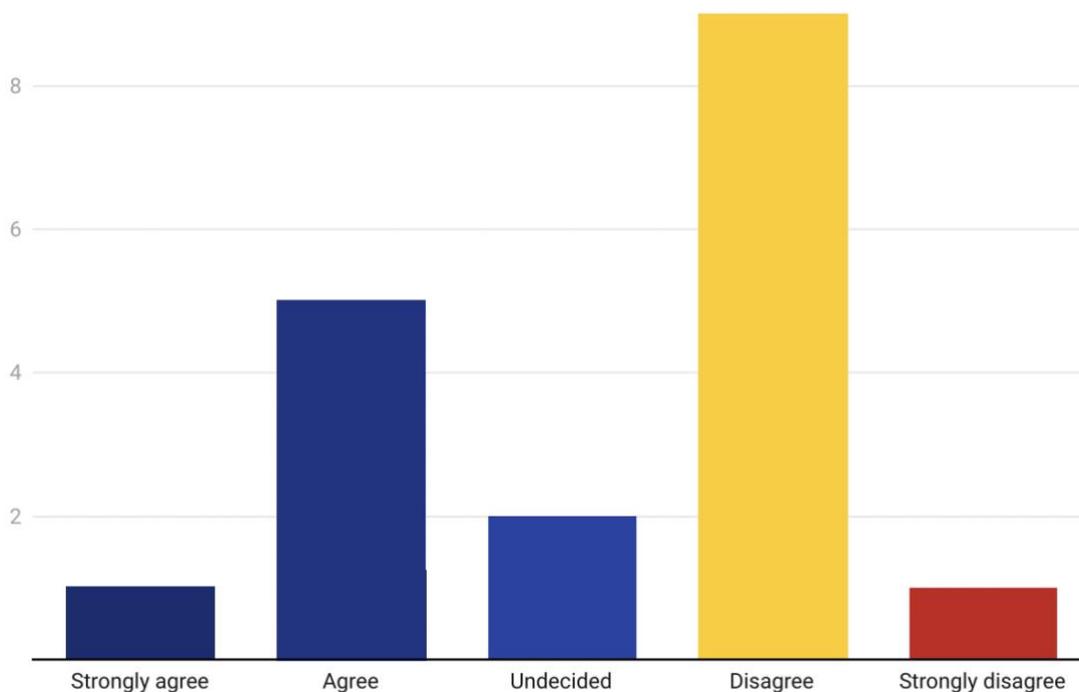


Chart: Formative evaluation workshop #2 (Oct 18 - 19, 2021) • Source: CROSP • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 10. Question: It would be sufficient to have access to all presentations after the workshop

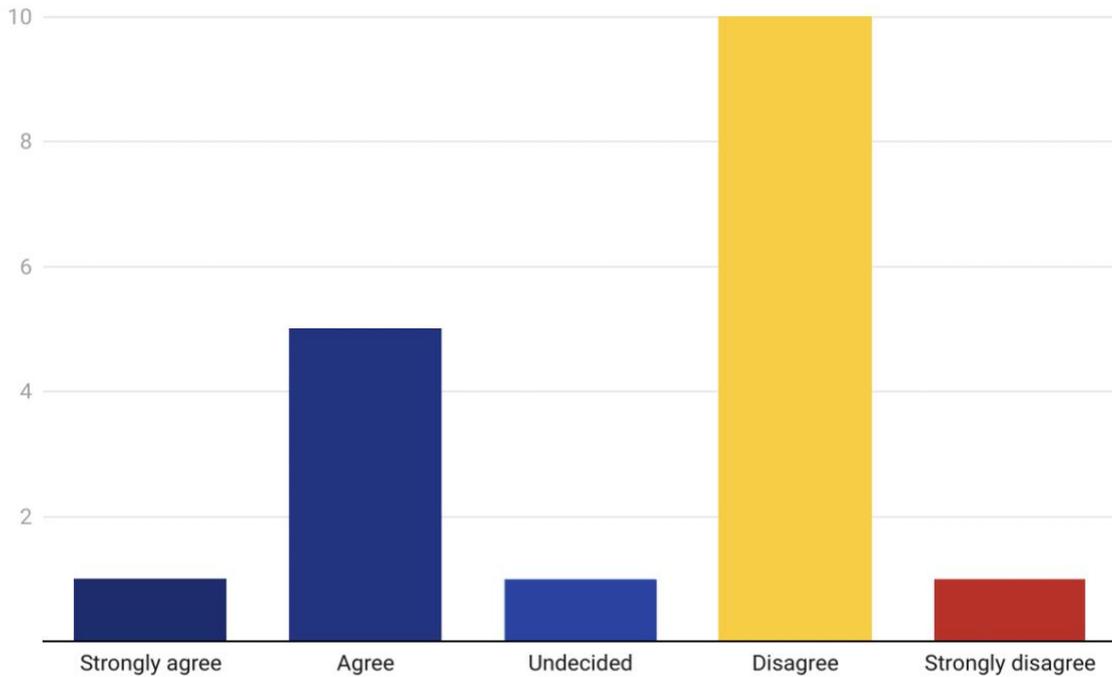


Chart: Formative evaluation workshop #2 (Oct 18 - 19, 2021) • Source: CROSP • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 11. Question: If I had to present at a workshop, it would be difficult for me to deliver the presentation well in advance so that it can be shared with participants in good time

There are remarkable differences in the evaluation of the quantity and quality of feedback from other participants on their own presentations (see [Table 12](#)).

Table 12. Questions relating to the presentation of participants' own country situation

| Question | WS 1 | WS 2 |
|---|------|------|
| Did you have the chance to present approaches your own country? (points = percent who answered with 'Yes') | 92 | 71 |
| If yes, to which extent did you get feedback from other peers to your presentation? | 68 | 58 |
| If yes, to which extent was the feedback helpful for you? | 65 | 63 |

Another part of the survey dealt with individual learning and the contribution the workshops make to this in each case. [Table 13](#) shows the results of the assessments and the comparison between the first and the second workshop.



Table 13. Questions relating to individual learning

| Question | WS 1 | WS 2 |
|---|------|------|
| How well did the presentation of your own country situation and feedback from peers worked for your own learning? | 71 | 61 |
| How well did the presentations of other countries worked for your own learning? | 83 | 65 |
| How well did discussions in the breakout rooms worked for your own learning? | 87 | 74 |
| How well did self-reflection worked for your own learning? | 78 | 62 |
| How well did group reflections on lessons learnt worked for your own learning? | –* | 69 |
| How well did presentations of conclusions from other group worked for your own learning? | 82 | 74 |

* Reflections on lessons learnt were added in workshop 2, hence no comparison with workshop 1 is possible

The final part of the questionnaire was about the quality and the content of the discussions, and the extent to which the learning was directly relevant and transferable to participants' own context (see [Table 14](#)).

Table 14. Questions relating to the quality of content discussion and interaction, and to the relevance and transferability of the learning

| Question | WS 1 | WS 2 |
|---|------|------|
| To which extent did the peers provide information of a sufficient depth so that you were able to learn from it? | 71 | 70 |
| To which extent did the workshop stimulate self-reflection on your specific country situation? | 78 | 76 |
| To which extent did the workshop identify policies and strategies that support the changing role of specialist provision? | 71 | 72 |
| To which extent did the workshop clarify the issues that need to be addressed in your own country? | 70 | 74 |
| To which extent did the workshop clarify the issues that need to be followed up in the further course of the project? | 70 | 73 |
| To which extent is the learning from this workshop directly relevant for your own context? | 83 | 79 |
| To which extent is the learning from this workshop directly transferable into your own context? | 74 | 72 |



3.5 Evaluation of the second intermediate online platform meeting

The results of the first intermediate online platform meeting indicated that participants would appreciate a second intermediate online platform meeting between the second workshop and the final project conference (score: 72 points). This second online meeting was scheduled for 1 April 2022. [Table 15](#) shows the meeting's structure. The expected number of participants was lower than the first online meeting, hence no breakout sessions were planned.

Table 15. Meeting structure for 1 April 2022 (excluding breaks)

| Duration | Format | Content |
|------------|---------|---|
| 90 minutes | Plenary | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction• Country experience in piloting the tool at national level: 3 country presentations• Discussion on the tool's purpose, usability, utility, etc. |
| 75 minutes | Plenary | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion on specific issues like instructions, terminology, rating scales, target groups, consistency• Information on the upcoming CROSP conference• Final CROSP tool |

This time, the survey for the formative evaluation was attached at the end of the event, and participants were asked to fill in their responses right away.

On one hand, the questions relevant for the formative evaluation were the same as for the first online meeting (see [Table 16](#)).

Table 16. Direct comparison of the two intermediate online platform meetings (IOPM) (scaling range from 0 to 100 points)

| Aspect | IOPM 1 (28 June 2021) | IOPM 2 (1 April 2022) |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| The extent to which this interim platform meeting was suitable to keep the participants informed about the progress of the project | 75 | 90 |
| The suitability of this meeting to pick up and maintain the momentum gained in the previous workshop | 69 | 80 |
| The suitability of this meeting to continue discussions where they had to stop at the end of the previous workshop | 76 | 73 |

On the other hand, implementing a central project step between the second workshop and this second online meeting, namely pilot testing the first draft of the tool in the participating countries, provided an additional opportunity for formative evaluation at this stage.



The testing was implemented in a decentralised way, i.e. the project participants received the tool (in draft form) and recommendations on how to implement the pilot testing in their countries, as well as a set of questions related to the experience gained from the testing. These questions were answered in this second online meeting and strongly influenced the further design of the project results. This step was particularly important because the first workshop survey showed that the project participants had hardly succeeded in involving local stakeholders in the preparations at the beginning of the project's second phase (at that time the lowest rating across all questioned topics). At the end of the project, the peers in their respective countries alone must ensure that the project's learning experiences 'stay alive' and are effectively incorporated into in-country developments. Accordingly, this trial is already an essential step towards the continuation of learning processes, but on a national level with possibly new peers.

As such, the following questions were added to the second online meeting (numbers in parentheses indicate the number of responses):

Did you have the chance to organise a workshop for pilot testing the tool?

- **NO (1):** What were the reasons or barriers for that?

Answer:

- *'Not concerned'*

- **YES (5):**

- Did you manage to involve a few other colleagues from the Ministry of Education?

- **NO (0)**
- **YES (5)**

- Did you manage to involve a few other colleagues from the other Ministries?

- **NO (5):** What were the reasons or barriers for that?

Answers:

- *'Lack of time. Other ministries (departments) were involved solely in being given information about the pilot, and with the hope of involvement in the implementation process'*
- *'Everyone's busy schedule'*
- *'Mainly time constraints'*
- *'No barriers, but we were not able to call upon colleagues e.g. from the Ministry of Health, but we wanted to. But our new Ministry now has personnel from the former Ministry of Social Affairs, so we covered that aspect'*

- **YES (0)**



- Did you manage to involve practitioners and other stakeholders?
 - **NO (2):** What were the reasons or barriers for that?
Answers:
 - *‘The ministry (department) consists of practitioners. They were involved. Local practitioners were not due to lack of time mainly’*
 - *‘Everyone’s busy schedule’*
 - **YES (3)**

The project team asked questions to document the experience of testing the tool. Beyond those questions, the formative evaluation was also interested in the aspects related to learning. The following questions were therefore not linked to the CROSP tool, but to the experience of implementing the testing:

- How easy or difficult has it been to convince the following stakeholders to participate in the testing of the CROSP tool?:
 - colleagues/policy-makers from the Ministry of Education: All five respondents invited them to participate. Score: **90 points**
 - stakeholders from other ministries: Just two respondents invited them to participate. Score: **87.5 points**
 - practitioners and other stakeholders: Just three respondents invited them to participate. Score: **92 points**

All answers fall between ‘easy’ and ‘very easy’. (Scale: ‘Very easy’ = 100, ‘Easy’ = 75, ‘Neutral’ = 50, ‘Difficult’ = 25, ‘Very difficult’ = 0)

- To which extent did you benefit in your reflections on the changing role of specialist provision from the discussions in your workshop that you organised?
 - Score: **72 points**
- To what extent could the participants in your workshop be suitable partners (or peers) to take forward developments on the changing role of specialist provision at national level even after CROSP has ended?
 - Score: **76 points**

(Scale: ‘To a very great extent’ = 100, ‘To a great extent’ = 80, ‘To a moderate extent’ = 60, ‘To some extent’ = 40, ‘To a small extent’ = 20, ‘Not at all’ = 0)

Finally, there were questions about the event’s impact in terms of reflecting on the role change, the relevance and the transferability of the findings to their own context. [Table 17](#) provides a comparison with the results of workshop 1 (WS 1) and workshop 2 (WS 2).



Table 17. Direct comparison of the two workshops and the second intermediate online platform meeting (IOPM 2) (scaling range from 0 to 100 points)

| Question | WS 1 | WS 2 | IOPM 2 |
|---|------|------|--------|
| To which extent did the second intermediate online platform meeting support you in your reflections on the changing role of specialist provision? | – | – | 93 |
| To which extent is the learning from this workshop directly relevant for your own context? | 83 | 79 | 83 |
| To which extent is the learning from this workshop directly transferable into your own context? | 74 | 72 | 80 |

3.6 Evaluation of the final project conference

The CROSP project phase 2 mainly took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and therefore had to adapt to travel and meeting restrictions most of the time. Fortunately, a face-to-face meeting was possible for the final project conference. This conference took place on 18 May 2022 in Athens, with most countries participating in it in person.

One of the project goals was to test peer-learning approaches and to identify and further develop promising approaches. For this reason, a one-hour session (see [Table 18](#)) was planned within the conference, which attempted to include the countries not yet participating in the project in the community of CROSP peers.

Table 18. Conference structure (excluding breaks)

| Duration | Format | Content |
|------------|---|---|
| 75 minutes | Plenary | Official opening and welcome CROSP video and methodology/process Key findings from the thematic workshops Description of the tool Two presentations of the piloting process Introduction to the peer-learning exercise |
| 60 minutes | Three tables in room 1 and two tables in room 2 | Peer-learning exercise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Round table session 1 (30 minutes) • Round table session 2 (30 minutes) |
| 30 minutes | Plenary | Summary: Main highlights of the project Dissemination discussion |



The peer-learning exercise aimed to enlarge the group of peers. The exercise did not focus on knowledge transmission, but on networking. It provided an opportunity to share the experiences of those who participated in the project and to listen to those who did not.

Methodologically, a 'World Café' approach was chosen, which uses an informal café setting for participants to explore and discuss an issue in small table groups. Participants were split across five round tables (between 11 and 14 people per table). Each table had a 'table host', a project participant who piloted the CROSP tool. The hosts were responsible for initiating and facilitating the round table discussions.

Discussions at the tables were held in two rounds of 30 minutes, with the sessions intended to allow for more relaxed and open conversations to take place. Table hosts were provided with a few guiding questions that were different for each round.

In the first round, questions dealt mainly with the opportunities in countries to use the CROSP tool, and with the specific country situations:

1. *Do you have thoughts on adjusting and using this tool in your own context?*
2. *Where are you in the process of changing the role of specialist provision?*

The questions in the second round aimed at creating opportunities for collaboration and networking:

3. *How can we help each other in our efforts to change the role of specialist provision?*
4. *Do you see any opportunity to link to specific people/countries, and to work more closely with them?*
5. *How can the tool support the development of synergies with each other?*

Agency staff members supported the table hosts and collected main discussion points on flipcharts. After the first round, the host remained at the table for the next round, while the other participants moved to a new table.

This peer-learning exercise was evaluated at the end of the conference, as a paper-pencil survey. In total, 31 responses were handed in. Thirteen of the respondents participated in the CROSP project (four of which piloted the CROSP tool) and seventeen did not. One respondent left this question unanswered.

[Table 19](#) and [Table 20](#) provide the results of the questionnaires. Since there were significant differences between CROSP participants and non-participants in some evaluation questions, the results are detailed according to the two groups.



Table 19. Agreement on a set of statements regarding the peer-learning exercise (Scale: ‘Fully agree’ = 100, ‘Agree’ = 75, ‘Undecided’ = 50, ‘Disagree’ = 25, ‘Fully disagree’ = 0)

| Statement | Score ¹ All respondents | Score CROSP participants | Score Other Agency members |
|---|---|---|---|
| Having 1 hour time available for exchange at different tables was helpful for me. | 76 | 75 | 76 |
| The hosts at the tables provided information that complemented well the plenary presentations. | 80 | 79 | 81 |
| I appreciated the opportunity to exchange in a smaller group. | 82 | 85 | 81 |
| The discussions brought up new ideas how I could use the CROSP outcomes. | 71 | 77 | 67 |
| After this 1 hour session I think I know whom I could contact in case I experience any questions in using the CROSP outcomes. | 67 | 60 | 72 |
| After this 1 hour session I think I know whom I could contact in case I need somebody to work together and/or to explore possible synergies in implementing the results of CROSP. | 60 | 52 | 65 |
| The chosen approach (the so-called <i>World Café</i>) provided a good change from the plenary part. | 79 | 83 | 76 |
| The two sessions each of 30 minutes were sufficient in duration to exchange with colleagues. | 65 | 62 | 68 |
| I would appreciate to follow up on these discussions even after the project has formally ended. | 69 | 71 | 67 |

¹ The scores for all respondents include the scores from CROSP participants, non-participants/other Agency member countries, and from those who left their participation status unanswered (one response).



Table 20. Assessment of the effectiveness, relevance and transferability of the peer-learning exercise (Scale: 'Not at all' = 0, 'To a small extent' = 20, 'To some extent' = 40, 'To a moderate extent' = 60, 'To a great extent' = 80, 'To a very great extent' = 100)

| Question To which extent ... | Score ² All respondents | Score CROSP participants | Score Other Agency members |
|---|---|---|---|
| ... did you find countries at the tables that you consider suitable to learn from for your specific country situation? | 56 | 53 | 58 |
| ... did you find enough countries at the tables to collect different ideas or suggestions to proceed in your own country? | 55 | 51 | 58 |
| ... did the peers at your tables provide information of a sufficient depth so that you were able to learn from it? | 55 | 51 | 54 |
| ... is the learning from this peer-learning session directly relevant for your own context? | 51 | 51 | 51 |
| ... is the learning from this peer-learning session directly transferable into your own context? | 44 | 42 | 46 |

Some of the respondents added the following comments:

- 'Some difficulties with a large group and the room and sound'
- 'Exchange experiences'
- 'I hope we will receive a summary of all the discussions that took place from all groups to provide a more holistic view of the session'
- 'Would be better to dive into the tool together at the tables!'
- 'Thank you, a very good session'.

² The scores for all respondents include the scores from participants, non-participants/other Agency member countries, and from those who left their participation status unanswered (one response).



4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The CROSP project is not the first Agency project to implement a peer-learning approach. The project built upon the basic knowledge and practical experience on this topic from the [CPRA](#) and [FPIES](#) projects, which already used peer-learning approaches. However, special attention should be paid to the further development of the peer-learning approach through the CROSP project's specific formative evaluation, with the longer-term goal of using this instrument in future Agency projects as well.

The CROSP project lent itself to this further development, as its recurring exchange meetings enabled the testing of different approaches with a survey of the respective effects. In this specific case, for example, the workshop format was changed based on the evaluation of the first workshop. Evaluation of the second workshop could assess the effectiveness of these changes. Similarly, the experience gained in the first intermediate online platform meeting could be incorporated in changes to the concept for the second intermediate online platform meeting. The extent to which these changes led to improvements could also be made transparent through the formative evaluation.

This chapter evaluates the results from the project implementation and indicates strengths and areas for improvement. The focus is exclusively on the events. The analysis of the methodological framework no longer plays a role here, as the resulting implications were directly taken up and implemented by the project team.

4.1 Online workshops

The discussions and decisions leading up to the first workshop resulted in an implementation concept that favoured smaller discussion groups. However, as technical and personnel capacities had to be considered as limiting factors, the first day of the workshop, in which the main content discussions took place, had to be spread over two days, with an identical format on both days but for different participants. The distribution of the participants was based on their thematic preferences, which they were asked in advance of the workshop. There was a very uneven distribution of interests, which led to groups of different sizes on the two days.

Materials were sent out in good time before each workshop so that participants could prepare. Participants in the first workshop rated all aspects of technical preparation, clarification of objectives and clarification of the participants' own roles in the workshop very positively (at least 83 points). In the evaluation of the second workshop, it is noticeable that technical preparation, with 73 points, clearly falls behind the first workshop, where it received 88 points. It can be hypothesised that the project team assumed that the technical requirements were known, which was perhaps not the case among the participants – possibly also due to changes in personnel or temporary substitutions.

The following sections examine and evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation decisions that were made based on the results of the first workshop evaluation and discussions in the project team (see [section 3.3](#)).



The workshop should follow the same dialogic structure as the first workshop

In terms of the quality achieved along different dimensions, the two workshops were essentially assessed in the same way. The scores achieved in each case only differ by a maximum of four points and are all in the range of 70 points or higher (see [Table 14](#)). In this respect, it can be assumed that this is a proven approach that should be further used and, if necessary, developed.

Thematically, the focus is now on other questions, and instead of four thematic areas, this time the participants will work on six guiding principles

The results on the extent to which the respective workshop contributed to identifying and discussing the four thematic areas or the six guiding principles yielded almost identical values. With 75 and 76 points respectively, it seems that this focus was effectively implemented.

Presentation slides should be shared with all participants in advance

The original plan to send presentation slides to all participants in time for the second workshop had to be changed at short notice. Instead, the relevance of making the slides available early was assessed from the perspective of both the presenter and the audience.

Half of the participants agreed with the statement that they do not usually have enough time to read through numerous documents before a workshop. One respondent was undecided, while the rest disagreed with the statement (see [Figure 9](#)).

However, most participants disagree with the statement that it would be sufficient if the presentation slides were only made available after a workshop. Only about one third of the participants think that access to the materials after the workshop would be sufficient (see [Figure 10](#)).

This diversity of expectations and wishes is also evident in the last statement on this topic. One third of the participants confirmed that it would be difficult for them to make their own presentation available before the workshop in time for it to be shared with the other participants. Almost two thirds of the participants disagree with this (see [Figure 11](#)).

With regard to this aspect, it becomes clear that there can be no single solution that completely meets the expectations, wishes and circumstances of all participants. It can only be recommended that the lead time before the workshops should be sufficiently long, that the effort to create and prepare presentations should be minimised and that all presentations should be published as soon as possible after, but ideally on the day of the event itself, if publication in advance of the workshop is not possible.

Participants should be given the opportunity to use the chat function bilaterally

Although video-conferencing systems generally offer the possibility of chatting directly with individual participants in parallel to a conference, this functionality was not activated in the first workshop. The basis for this decision could not be ascertained. Participants criticised this deficiency after the first workshop and it should therefore have been eliminated in the second workshop. Surprisingly, however, the function was still not activated and was therefore unavailable in the second workshop. Accordingly, the rating for this was more than 20 points below the already poor score from the first workshop.



The recommendation to be made here therefore hardly needs any further explanation. Since the need to use technical platforms already limits the opportunities for peer learning, the technical possibilities of the system employed should be used to the maximum to offer the participants options or alternatives for exchanging information with each other. In addition to the above-mentioned 1:1 chat function, this could also include, for example, the possibility of independently creating and using breakout rooms, or spontaneous use of the CROSP video-conference system with other participants without major hurdles, even after a workshop.

Participants should be given five minutes to reflect on what they have heard after each presentation

A suggestion before the second workshop was to give participants five minutes to reflect after a presentation, either individually or bilaterally (although the technical platform for implementing the video conference did not offer bilateral meeting possibilities), to increase the quality of feedback on presentations. The facilitators should therefore ensure an available period after each presentation. The participants' evaluation shows that this was not always successful; with 51 points, it achieved one of the lowest scores.

The recommendation here is to always use this approach if it is not possible to send the presentation to the participants in advance (see below). In this case, it should be considered whether reflection time will contribute to quality improvement. Regardless, the time schedule must provide sufficient leeway to add in this reflection time, even at short notice.

Presenters should get guiding questions to be able to go deeper into the examples

Presenters were given guiding questions in advance so the groups could elaborate on enabling/success factors in their countries' processes, the main challenges countries encountered in their processes, the main lessons countries learnt, and plans for further developments in countries. Most, if not all, speakers used these guiding questions to structure their presentations. This is also reflected in the participants' evaluation. They were asked to what extent they had heard about these four aspects in the workshop. All scores are in the range of 71 to 82 points and thus achieve very good values.

Using a few guiding questions seems to work well and provides both presenters and listeners with a comprehensible structure.

Sufficient time should be provided to reflect on the lessons learnt and to document the results

The evaluation did not focus on the time factor but on the impact of reflection on learning. Reflection in the group on participants' own learning was rated moderately (69 points), while self-reflection was rated slightly worse (62 points), with a significant decline compared to the first workshop (see [Table 13](#)). The relevance of the summaries from other groups to participants' own learning was rated well (74 points), but also lower than in the first workshop (82 points).

Less a recommendation and more an idea for future events is to examine how tightly scheduled and full, in terms of content, the agenda needs to be, and whether offering time-limited buffers for reflection and orientation after work-intensive phases is



advisable. Such phases can be found in face-to-face meetings during breaks, over a meal together or in random conversations on the fringes of an event. These opportunities are not available in online events and may therefore have to be created.

Plenary phases should be shortened, breakout phases should get more time compared to the first workshop

In the second workshop, most participants agreed that there was a good balance between group work (in breakout rooms) and plenary phases (81 points). Compared to the first workshop, the distribution of workshop time between plenary and group phases worked out for most of the participants (67 points).

Online and face-to-face workshops need both plenary and group phases, so the recommendation is not to maximise one and minimise the other. The proportions of the two phases depend on the objectives of the event: it is easier to develop content and exchange ideas in smaller groups, but the plenary is more effective for warming participants to a topic, informing all participants or building consensus. Finding the right balance between the two phases is a task for any preparation for future meetings.

The number of participants per group should be increased by setting up just two breakout rooms

The change in group size got a score of 63 in the evaluation, which corresponds with an assessment between 'acceptable' and 'good' (see [Table 11](#)). A larger group size also implies a greater diversity of countries whose experiences can in principle be brought into the discussions. The evaluation seems to confirm this hypothesis: compared to the first workshop, the participants' ratings for the number of countries in their group that they could learn from improved by 5 points, and the number of countries from which they could get ideas or suggestions for further development in their own country improved by 6 points (see [Table 8](#)).

However, an increased group size brings the disadvantage that fewer participants can present the situation in their own country: 92% in the first workshop, 71% in the second workshop. A low score of only 58 points was given for the amount of feedback on participants' own presentations and 63 points for the helpfulness of the feedback. Both ratings deteriorated from the first to the second workshop.

The quality of feedback on presentations was discussed in the project team before the second workshop. A hypothesis was that listeners may be too overwhelmed to spontaneously respond to a presentation in sufficient depth. The suggested strategies were to share the presentations before the event and to allow a short reflection period after each presentation (see above). However, neither aspect was implemented in the second workshop, or only to a limited extent.

The interpretation of the results should not leave the impression that the workshops were rated poorly in terms of peer learning. In only a few cases is the evaluation negative – the vast majority of the workshop implementation is evaluated positively or very positively. The positively-evaluated characteristics should be maintained, but their causes are not always obvious and may still need to be discussed and explored in the project team. Only then can the team ensure that the current strengths of the approach are not inadvertently lost in future events.



4.2 Intermediate online platform meetings

The first intermediate online platform meeting was scheduled to bridge the relatively large period of time between the two project workshops (one year) and to help maintain and continue the discussions. The peer-learning process was expected to continue through online platform meetings enabling participants to progress with the framework for developing the tool. The first online platform meeting also aimed to prepare the discussions for the second thematic workshop and the final project conference. Attendance at the meeting was open to all participants.

The time frame of less than two hours allocated for the first intermediate online platform meeting necessitated a thematic focus and strict adherence to time constraints. The analysis of the results (see Figures 5, 6, 7 and 8) shows that most participants – with one clear exception – felt well informed about the project’s progress as a result of the meeting. However, the period between the first workshop and this meeting seems to have been too long to maintain the momentum generated in the first workshop. This might have required more frequent and regular exchanges. While the participants saw the meeting as a good opportunity to follow up on the discussions in the first workshop, opinions differed as to whether a second meeting of this kind would be helpful.

Attendance at the second intermediate online platform meeting was again open to all participants, but only those countries that had actually tested the CROSP tool that was drafted and distributed before this meeting participated. The event had 16 participants, of which seven belonged to the CROSP project team, i.e. nine participants represented eight countries (Estonia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Northern Ireland, Malta, Portugal, Sweden). In the evaluation survey, just six responses were received. Accordingly, the quantitative results must be interpreted with the reservation of the small number of participants.

The suitability of this second meeting to keep the participants informed about the progress of the project received a high score (90 points). However, participants in this meeting already showed a higher level of activity in the project, as they managed – despite time constraints – to pilot the CROSP tool in their countries. Hence, their answers might not be representative for the whole group of project participants.

Through the design of the piloting process, other national stakeholders were involved in the content-related discussions. The extent to which the discussions held there were helpful for stakeholders’ own reflection was given 72 points (i.e. between moderate and great extent), and the potential of the participants as ‘collaborators’ in taking forward developments on the changing role of specialist provision was given 76 points (close to great extent).

Finally, the second intermediate online platform meeting performed well in comparison to the previous two workshops (see [Table 17](#)) with regard to its contribution to countries’ reflections on the changing role of specialist provision, the relevance of the learning from this meeting for countries’ own context and the transferability of the learning to countries’ own context (all scored 80 points or higher, i.e. to a great extent or more).

As already mentioned, all results should be considered under the reservation of the low number of participants in this second meeting.



The following recommendations can be derived from this:

- The time intervals between the online meetings and the workshops should be discussed and adjusted if necessary.
- It should be critically questioned whether solitary meetings are in principle suitable for continuing discussions over a longer period of time, especially if participation is voluntary and the composition of the participants changes.
- This also raises the question of the extent to which the timing of the project makes such time intervals necessary, or whether a different project design could also allow for a tighter cycle and thus, possibly, more 'seamless' discussion processes.

Finally, compared to the workshops, the intermediate online platform meetings had a great advantage in that they could be better integrated into the participants' daily work routine, whereas the workshops blocked at least 1.5 working days each.

4.3 Final project conference

The project pursued several goals, and the final conference was the last major project activity. On the one hand, it aimed to present the project results, especially the developed CROSP tool, to all participants. As not all conference attendees had participated in the CROSP project, this required some basic explanations and an introduction to the tool's background. On the other hand, it raised the question of how far the framework of a fixed-term project could deal with the topic. Obviously, the topic can only be implemented with numerous political decisions and changes, which can extend in time accordingly.

As soon as the project is completed, the exchange platforms for peer learning, specifically the workshops and online meetings, will no longer be available. The question therefore arose as to:

- how to provide mutual support and learning from each other even after the end of the project;
- how those countries that were not directly involved in the project activities could equally participate in future peer support and learning.

However, it should be noted that the Agency's structure, especially bi-annual meetings, provides a special platform that National Co-ordinators and Representative Board members can use for thematically open peer learning.

Taking advantage of the first in-person meeting after more than two years of the pandemic required a format that would allow for exchange between peers. The so-called 'World Café' method is a low-threshold format. It allowed the approximately 60 participants to spread across several tables and discuss different topics with each other.

However, the method was adapted, which – as can be seen from the evaluations – should be discussed critically. First, the group composition was determined in advance. The original method allows participants to move freely from table to table. Furthermore, it was decided that the participant groups would move to a different table after half an hour, i.e. the group composition did not change between the two phases. And finally, the



tables were not thematically different, but the decision was for all tables to deal with one topic in the first half of the available time, and a different topic in the second half.

The highest approval was given to the fact that, after the plenary part, the peer-learning session offered opportunity for exchange in a smaller group (82 points). Positive ratings were also given to how the information complemented the plenary contributions (80 points), the World Café method (79 points) and the opportunity to exchange at different tables (76 points). While CROSP participants scored the statement that ‘discussions brought up new ideas how I could use the CROSP outcomes’ high with 77 points, other participants scored this statement with 67 points. This could be an indication that other participants were not yet ready to discuss the use in relation to the project results based on the plenary information. Most participants would appreciate a follow up on these discussions even after the project has formally ended (69 points).

There are areas for improvement in the networking between CROSP participants and representatives from other Agency member countries. Opinions differ about whether a one-hour session was sufficient to find out whom to contact with questions about using the CROSP outputs (67 points). The duration itself was scored with 65 points, which indicates that more time was desired for exchange. And finally, opinions also differ significantly about whether participants know after the session whom to contact about working together and/or exploring possible synergies in implementing the CROSP results (60 points). These indications can be used to reflect on whether there are other ways to provide the information of competent contacts on the project topic to all participants.

Even though the session was called a peer-learning exercise, the main objective was to better connect CROSP participants with representatives from the Agency member countries that were not participating in the project, in order to involve them in future peer learning. However, the evaluation results indicate that the time available was insufficient to identify ‘appropriate’ peers for everyone. The assessment of both the extent to which suitable learning partners were available at participants’ own table and the extent to which a wide variety of ideas for implementation in participants’ own country or information with sufficient depth was available were relatively low, at 56 and 55 points respectively.

The fact that learning was not the main focus of this session can be seen not least in the answers to the questions on the relevance and transferability of what was learnt to participants’ own context. With 51 and 44 points respectively, both questions, which were used as check questions in this case, are rated correspondingly low.

In summary, interactivity and alternatives to plenary formats are valued. At the same time, the answers and reactions during the conference also show the desire for more degrees of freedom, e.g. allowing participants to decide for themselves on which tables or in which groups they would like to participate.

The extent to which the participants had different expectations would need to be clarified in the future. The preceding plenary phase focused primarily on the concrete project result, the CROSP tool. Statements from individual participants not involved in the project indicate that they expected more detailed information on the concrete application of this tool. However, discussions between the project participants over the course of the project



showed that it requires much more than using a single tool to actually change the role of specialist provision.

4.4 Final remarks

The project implementation fell in an unfavourable period of time, as travel and personal meetings were limited or impossible due to the pandemic. As a result, adjustments to the implementation concept and especially to the concrete design of the peer-learning concept were necessary. Best practice recommendations found in the literature could not be adopted unchanged due to the situation, and accordingly new paths had to be taken. Conversely, it also means that the evaluation results can only provide indications for the implementation of peer learning under comparable conditions – it does not permit a one-to-one transfer to other situations in which, for example, face-to-face meetings are possible again.

It must also be considered that the participants were policy-makers who – at least in part – had known each other for a long time and had already had the opportunity to get to know each other personally through other activities in the context of the Agency. For survey efficiency reasons, a more in-depth investigation of possible differences in assessment between participants who had been involved in Agency activities for a long time and those who had only been participating for a short time was dispensed with. For future peer learning implementations, which may continue to take place exclusively online, it may be helpful to better integrate the ‘newcomers’ group more quickly into the overall group through a complementary approach.

A final recommendation for peer learning concerns the inherent disadvantage that all projects are limited in time, but address topics that are usually of a longer-term nature and can only be tackled and mastered as a process. The learning process initiated in projects in general and the peer learning that is initiated and develops should not end but should be continued after the project’s lifetime. For example, a working group from Sweden that pilot tested the tool in March 2022 recommended that ‘continuation sometime after the tool is translated will likely stimulate further peer learning’ (Joel Rutschman at the second intermediate online meeting, 1 April 2022). There is currently no structured approach to support this learning process beyond the duration of the project. Although topics are already being taken up after the end of the respective projects within the framework of bi-annual meetings, how sufficient and effective consideration in this specific framework is for the respective topic areas has not yet been assessed.

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